

The Washington Times

NATO adopts costly 6-year defense plan

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AP) — NATO adopted a six-year defense plan yesterday that may be too expensive to implement.

It also expressed guarded hope for better East-West relations under the new Soviet leadership.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and defense chiefs of 14 allied countries approved North Atlantic Treaty Organization force plans that call for major weapons purchases, modernization of equipment and better deployment of forces to meet what a declaration termed "the continuing buildup of armaments" by the Soviet bloc.

The six-year plan is a codification of all the pledges NATO nations have made over the past few months to buy thousands of tanks and anti-tank weap-

ons, new warships and hundreds of jet fighters.

The full plan is secret, but most of the major details, such as a U.S. pledge to deploy modern M1 battle tanks in Europe and plans by Europeans to buy more U.S. F-16 fighter planes, have been announced.

"I think there's a recognition of the need to do all we possibly can," Weinberger said after ministers approved the plan at an alliance strategy session. "There's a recognition also that the economic situation is difficult and different in each country."

In a campaign to get the plan approved, U.S. Gen. Bernard Rogers, supreme commander of allied forces, has estimated it may require governments to make 4 percent-a-year increases beyond inflation in their

defense budgets. Several NATO nations already have failed to meet a 1978 commitment to increase defense spending 3 percent a year.

"Quite a few countries have so many difficulties in the economic field," said NATO Secretary General Joseph Luns. "Too often these plans have been adopted and then in reality some countries have done less than they have pledged."

British Defense Minister John Nott said, "There are no signs European NATO countries can put more money into conventional weapons."

According to new NATO figures, only the United States this year will spend as much as 7 percent of its Gross National Product on defense, half the percentage the Soviet Union reportedly spends.

Despite the funding problems expressed by the Europeans, Weinberger said the pledges to increase defenses and other measures announced at the meeting would provide ammunition in the Reagan administration's attempt to defeat legislative amendments calling for recall of some U.S. troops in Europe.

Legislation introduced by Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, calls for withdrawal of up to 23,000 troops unless the Europeans improve their own defenses.

The other measures include a renewal of a commitment by the Europeans to provide support for U.S. military operations outside NATO's boundaries and a reaffirmation of decisions to deploy 572 new U.S. Pershing 2 and cruise missiles in Europe, beginning next year.